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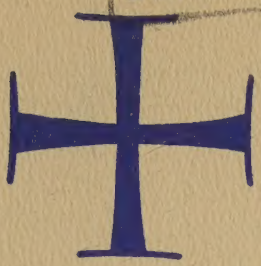
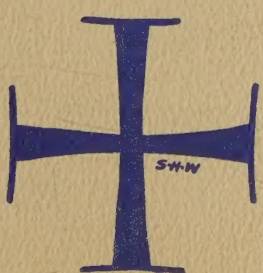


Canada and Christendom



CANADA and CHRISTENDOM

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EDITORIAL

There are two kinds of parishes in Canada. There is the parish - be it large or small, rural or urban - in which the priest is working with one clearly defined purpose in view: to bring the people to know God; to show that God in Christ, and Christ in the Church is the fundamental and crucial fact of our existence. This is by no means an objective easily achieved, and to work with this single purpose does not inevitably result in immediate and obvious success, in immense congregations and hefty budgets - although in certain cases it may. It is certainly not a painless job. But it is a job that is being done by some priests in some Canadian parishes.

There is also another kind of parish. This is the parish - be it large or small, rural or urban, prosperous or poor- in which the priest has somewhat vaguer notions of his work. Perhaps he thinks his job is to teach people to be good (which being interpreted, means not to gamble, drink, or play games on Sunday). Perhaps he thinks his job is to build up an endless series of organizations, clubs, youth groups, A.Y.P.A.'s on the theory that at least this keeps the children off the streets, and provides some sort of respectable social centre for the community. This second kind of thinking might be summed up in the idea that the church is the greatest force in the world for good, and therefore should be supported. And this, by the way, is the official slogan for church extension in at least one Canadian diocese.

To clarify the contrast further (although we fully realize that this contrast is not always so sharply defined in practice), it might be argued that the first of these theories says that the Church confronts man with the truth and therefore compels society's attention, while the second implies that the church does a lot of good things towards the maintainance of a healthy society, and is therefore <u>useful</u> to society.

The second of these types of parishes is of course a clear indication of the extent to which modern culture has overwhelmed the Church, and subordinated it to its own purposes. The natural pull of circumstances in any parish, in other words, tends to work against the idea for which the parish stands, and unless the parish clearly and consciously recognizes and faces this fact, it will succumb to the pressure of secular influences. The A.Y.P.A. will become just another social group. The Sunday school will become

a somewhat feeble instrument by which society attempts to inoculate children against certain obvious vices. And in every case where Sunday worship conflicts with an important secular event, the Church will run a dismal second.

The really frightening aspect of this situation is that the priest who compromises with anti-religious or non-religious forces may often appear to be more successful. He may find that by making a few judicious concessions here and there he can build up a "flourishing" parish. This is not an easy temptation to withstand, and in fact such a policy can sometimes be quite effectively rationalized in the terms we have mentioned above.

Obviously, this is not a new problem for the Church. It is clear from history that every generation of Christians must critically re-examine the position of the Church in their own society. We are maintaining that it is time Canadians undertook such a project, and suggest that students, priests and laymen re-evaluate the Church's mission and methods. We are raising this general question: how can the Church, or to be more specific, any particular parish concentrate its religious energy and use it in such a way that it isn't simply dissipated in the operation of a large parish machine? How can the Church be the creator of a culture and not merely its by-product? This is a large question and there is no simple answer to it, but the editors of CANADA AND CHRISTENDOM hope to devote this magazine to a consideration of this problem in a number of its aspects. The first issue includes an article on the problem of the liturgy in parish life, and also an article by a Toronto layman outlining the idea of a particular kind of Christian community that might be established. It also includes an article on the Christian view of death, and we hope to establish a practise of including an article in each issue dealing with some particular problem in the general field of moral theology. We would be grateful for any suggestions or ideas from our readers.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE

Two centuries ago an English clergyman, Charles Wheatly by name, published a learned volume entitled A Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer. The reduction to rationality of the result of a century of controversy, much

of it misguided, might well have seemed a fruitless task, but Wheatly did succeed in laying bare the principles embodied in the very structure of the Christian Liturgy, which even the misunderstandings of the Reformation had failed to eradicate from Anglican worship. If, however, the learned author of A Rational Illustration could see the Anglican rite in its usual setting to-day, it is only too likely that he would confess himself defeated by the power of misunderstanding and ignorance to bring about what Papist blunders, followed by a century of Anglican confusion and Puritan fury, had failed to produce. It is hard for the observer of common Anglican practice to avoid the conclusion that we have managed, thanks to sentimental perversity, unintelligent conservatism, and sheer stupidity, to produce a pattern of public worship of which it is impossible to make theological, liturgical or devotional sense.

It would be amusing (even though painful) to list some of our more obvious follies-- our "processions" and "recessions", our steady reduction of the scriptural element in Morning and Evening Prayer in favour of hymns and sermons, neither of which necessarily bear any relation to the biblical revelation, our turning of our altars into flower-stands, our fondness (more widespread than most Anglicans realize) for fussy "Roman" details, such as the "Last Gospel", and so on. We are concerned here, however, with the tragedy rather than the comedy of Anglican worship, the tragedy of the perversion of the whole pattern of our Sunday Liturgy.

This perversion is symbolized by what goes on at the "late Celebration", held once or twice a month at eleven o'clock. After the sermon, which closes the Ante-Communion, properly so-called, the congregation sing a hymn, or the choir an anthem, while neatly dressed sidesmen take over the service. The hymn or anthem completed, from two to twenty figures, carrying full collection plates, march solemnly to the front of the church. Choirboys, servers and curates converge on the focal point -- a large brass almsdish. This vessel piled high with bags and plates, is placed upon the altar, while the choir (perhaps turned eastwards) sing some appropriate or inappropriate words.

The Prayer for the Church is then said, and a hymn is sung, during which more than half the congregation make their way out, just as if they had never noticed a little ceremony that went on in the chancel while the sidesmen were

occupying the limelight.

This contrast between the Collection, carried out with some solemnity, and the Offertory, done in hole-and-corner fashion, and ignored by the bulk of the people, who leave before its purpose is achieved, shows just how far corruption has gone in our common ways of worship. A secondary ceremony (the Collection of money) has obscured the primary act (the Offertory of bread and wine) to which it is attached, and the meaning of the latter as the first moment in a solemn act of worship is almost completely forgotten. We may laugh when we hear some misguided Nonconformist contrast a Communion Service with a "service of worship", but our own widespread practice makes our laughter sound a bit hollow.

All this can happen only because we have lost sight of the real and unique meaning of Christian worship. Christian worship means consecration by God's grace, self-giving to the triune God, the worship of the Father through Jesus Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and none of this finds adequate expression in the kind of service described above. It is true that "Collection-religion" testifies to the power of our instinct for worship, self-giving, and sacrifice, but it also bears witness to our failure to pass beyond paganism or Judaism to the Christian level of worship. "Collection-religion" has no uniquely Christian quality, because it lacks the deep unity of symbol and thing signified, of liturgical sacrifice and personal self-surrender, which marks the sacramental offering of Christians. What we need is a return to "Offertory-religion", to the setting in which alone the simple gift of money has any Christian meaning. But that involves a deeper understanding of the Christian worship of God.

Being a Christian means being brought into the life of God himself, as member of Christ, child of the Father, and temple of the Spirit. Worshipping as a Christian, then, means sharing in the self-giving that eternally goes on in God, as the Son, born in the Father's eternal act of perfect self-giving, gives himself to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit. That sharing is possible, because what goes on in the divine life began to happen in our world, when the Son of Mary was born in Bethlehem. The Son of God lived out his eternal self-giving to the Father in human thoughts, words, and actions. Born a human child, He became the perfect Priest, the perfect Offerer of human life, because

the life He offered was spotless and complete, and perfectly possessed by God. And on the Cross He sealed that offering in the most decisive self-surrender, in the giving up of life itself to the glory of God. Then, and then only, He bore his human life into the glory of the eternal Trinity, to take its full part for ever in the eternal movement of self-giving love that goes on in the life of God.

That does not mean, however, that this divine love is no longer expressed among men on earth. The risen Christ lives in our world in the Church which is his Body, the fellowship of men and women, boys and girls, bound to him in the wonder of mutual indwelling. And He expresses his self-giving love week by week and day by day, in his Church's most solemn act. The Son of God, Christ our Brother, who gave himself once for all in self-sacrifice and now offers his sacrificed Body eternally in heaven, offers that Body among us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, making before his Father and ours the memorial of his death, the one perfect act of human worship. At the altar, heaven's mystery comes down to earth, as it did on Calvary. At the altar is carried out the only act of worship through which we can be made ready for our destiny of eternal life in God. At the altar alone can we take part in the unique Christian act of worship, that gives Christian meaning to all our prayers and hymns and generous actions.

Just look at the Liturgy itself, uncluttered by our fatuous mistakes. At the Offertory (so often obscured by the "clink of money round the altar") Christ's people give to God his chosen token of their self-offering as brothers and sisters of the Son of God. At the Consecration the Church which is Christ's Body brings to remembrance his death -- his perfect act of self-giving and worship -- and Christ acts, through the hands and lips of his priest in his Church, to make these tokens of his people's self-giving one with his own offering, by transmuting them into his Body and Blood, once surrendered on the Cross, and eternally offered in heavenly glory. Then, in Communion, we take the Body broken and the Blood poured out, the tokens of our own self-surrender made into heavenly reality, in order that our souls and bodies may be grasped by the power of Christ's Sacrifice, and made one with what He did on Calvary, and in that way become one with what goes on for ever in the life of God the Holy Trinity.

The Holy Communion is nothing less than the Sacrifice

of Christ the Son of God, re-presented by him in and through his Church on earth, as He re-presents it in heaven. One of the greatest needs of our weak and corrupt Church is that we should learn to reform our worship, so that the clumsiness of our celebration of the Eucharist will cease to turn people away from this supreme Christian privilege of giving all honour and glory to the Father Almighty, through and with Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, world without end.

--- E.R.F.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEATH

The triumph of Jesus Christ over death is also the victory of each Christian over his own death. This is, of course, the specific proclamation of Easter Day, but the Church exists because of it, and to secure it for every man. What exactly does the Resurrection mean? What, in part, is the significance of death? What do Christians mean by a holy death? These are questions which face every man for all men must die; and these questions, derived from the universal experience of men, the church claims to answer in her doctrine and life.

The truth of the Resurrection unfortunately appears to many people to be a quaint story from the dim past - or for the more religious, a kind of happy ending to the dismal drama of the Crucifixion. That it seems to have little relevance for us now is largely due to the fact that we bring to our understanding of it a totally unchristian notion of life and death. We have ideas about the indestructible and immortal nature of the soul which is not Biblical, and a view of death which is at once fatalistic and naturalistic. By the notion of immortality we believe that our souls- whatever they are-- somehow go on existing after the body disintegrates in death.

Christianity does not commit itself to the doctrine of immortality without serious qualification. It does not believe that men's spiritual natures persist beyond death by a kind of everlasting projection of this life. It does not believe that there is nothing to do in Heaven but 'utter prolonged sighs of sanctified weariness'. It believe- rather in the Resurrection of the whole man, radically

transformed by the grace of God - both body and soul in one redeemed, splendid and inseparable unity. And it believes too, that Christ is the first fruit of them that sleep- that His experience is shared by all those who are possessed by faith and hope and love.

Our view of death is derived from our experience of nature. Death and decay come to all creatures. The constant fluctuation of the seasons is a source of a paralysing melancholy for many sensitive people. Birth, maturity, old age and death. This inevitable sequence is everywhere proclaimed. Yet what is universally true of all creatures beneath man is not necessarily true of him. We are not beasts; we are capable of willing and knowing (of loving, in short), and in this activity we transcend both space and time.

That is one of the reasons why death is for us such an intolerable thing, and also why we attempt so desperately to pretend that it isn't a termination, why in both life and death we distract ourselves by the meaningless and the insignificant. It is because we are capable of willing to love someone until' death do us part', that the fact of separation in death is an affront. The promise of the marriage vow presupposes our human capacity to transcend all the vicissitudes of time and the obliterating effects of separation in space. For creatures who are thus able to transcend the circumstances of our spacio-temporal environment, death is wholly unnatural.

The Church has never taught that death is simply the natural termination of life- as it is in flowers or animals. It states that death is the result of sin, or separation from God who is Life itself. The will of man turned back on itself, and so forsook, as a man might the woman he has promised to love, the source and fountain of all Life. We wanted our own death rather than His Life, and so became deathful. Because then, we are creatures of sin, we are bound to die. The corruption of an individual's body is a sign of his interior death, for as long as we are not possessed by the Love and the Life of God we really are in death. To die physically is really the body's final 'yea' to the soul- a sort of grim parting gesture, by which it acknowledges for its part what has been the case with the whole man all along. Yet, of course, our human nature, as created in the image and for the likeness of God does not change. We are still the kind of creature that ought not to

die, and that is why death, our actual physical death projected back along the entire course of our life history creates within us such appalling tensions.

When our Lord God became man, he took upon himself the whole condition of our existence, including its deathful quality. He died so that He might redirect the life of man, restoring its whole course in a Lifeward direction. He turned it rightside up. He gave his own life, the life of a man, back to God in one complete and perfect act of will, and in doing so He restored man's life to Life- He gave man back to God the Father. 'No man taketh my life from me, I lay it down of myself'. Because He laid it down, because He lost it in the Will of God, He found it on the Resurrection morning. Nor was this decision a single act of magnificent heroism mustered on the evening of the Passion. It was the purpose of his whole life. 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me'. He was Life because He had always died- always given his life wholly and utterly to the Father.

So a holy death for us must involve the loss of the false life, the loss of our introverted wills, the abandonment of what we think we possess, to the Life and service and Will of God. And this is accomplished through our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. This is the whole force of the Good News of the Gospel- that we can have this eternal, splendid Life, on condition that we die in Him, that we lose ourselves in his service. We must die daily to ourselves that we might live daily unto the Father of Life. Very few of us can simply and sincerely say that we die daily, but it is the glory of the Christian that he is always trying.

Our putting on of this deathless life is not going to be easy, for each of us must constantly tread the path of death. This path Mr. T.S. Eliot has described as one of prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action. The voluntary surrender of our lives to his Life involves a resolution to stop clutching at the flowers that we hope will not wither, at the images whose freshness will keep alive in us the fading memory of things and persons we thought we loved, at the entertainment or the drug or the fad that the intoxication of which we trust will never stale or pall, at the medicine which is not of Eternal Life, at the whole enchanting and frenzied multitude of escapes we allow ourselves to be distracted by, while we hug more closely the little morsel of dust we are to ourselves.

It is a race, however, not run in despair, for our Lord God has run it before us. He has got Himself and us the victory, and has promised us Life for life, his Life for our life. Where do we start to die to self? We may adapt Mr. Eliot's suggestion. Right here and now -- a simple prayer a regular observance (something we can manage), a simple discipline of body, an attempt at constructive reading and thought, an action undertaken out of desire to please God rather than ourselves. This is the way of Him who has invigorated the weakness of our mortal state with his own deathless might.

D.F.B.

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Two recent articles in CANADA AND CHRISTENDOM suggest the importance attached by conscientious 'ambassadors of Christ' to the corporate life in 'practical' and devotional aspects. In one article we learn of the corporate life of students working in industry in Montreal, and in a later we are impressed with the importance of the cell and of the parish mission. These are all important as experiments and as exercise to lead God's Church into a fuller experience and realization of the Incarnation. But the desperate internal and external situation of Western civilization suggests that these earnest gropings towards the will of the Father for His children must lead to bold and radical Christian experiments.

Whether we examine a Canadian factory city or a middle-class community we realise that Christian brotherhood is largely disregarded in all classes. Worse than that, the very institutions of modern life, from factories to the stock exchange, are both actively hostile to the operation of simple personal relationships and almost completely prohibitive of the development of joy and pride in individual work. We do not have to share Spengler's despair to realise that a 'megalopolitan' society bears all the marks of the final stage of decay in a civilization. The marageríal revolution is bearing horrible fruit in the destruction of the family and the standardization of the individual response, and many of the institutions once considered Christian wither in the presence of the defiant vulgarism of 'mass thinking'.

Christians are awake, yet unsure of what they are to do next. The World Council at Amsterdam condemned alike

capitalism and communism, and the late Primate of Canada announced God's opposition to avarice among His children. But only spasmodically is the Chruch taking positive action to set an example of a new and wholly Christian society. If the brotherhood of man is to be shown forth by the Body of Christ, we must create the communal Christian life in visible units, more material and compact than the parish, yet not replacing the parish, just as the cell is simpler and more compact than the parish without replacing it.

When Jerome and Paula grew disgusted with the gross sensuality of urbanized society, they heard the call of God to the foundation of monastic institutions. Over the course of five hundred years the conventual life became a treasury of both contemplation and evangelical fervour, and from the monasteries of Britain and France the saints went out to bring the Body of Christ into the bodies of barbarians. Again, amidst the confusion of liberalism in politics and religion, or in spite of the narrow biblism and fanaticism of sects, from the seventeenth century to the present groups of men and women have planned, migrated and settled, in corporate units in the hope of creating unified and holy societies which would have the vision of God within them and the common life in Christ about them. While the optimistic secularist - often a unitarian - looks for a Utopia, plans a Pantisocracy with Coleridge or actually operates a Brooke Farm in New England, the Quaker, the Mennonite, the Doukhobor or the Mormon actually creates a religious community claiming God for its Head and Goal. How great then are the possibilities in similar endeavours for Christians enriched by the Grace and age-long experience of the Catholic Faith!

Whether by communal effort in material living and corporate life in prayer God will give us the power to set the whole West on fire with holiness before the deluge of decay we cannot say. It is unlikely, for the sins of this civilization are heavy upon it, and largely unrepented. There are signs - we may find them in the barbarian hordes of Asia or in the eroded deserts of mid-western America - that a writ of judgment is issued upon materialism and greed, secularism and disobedience. But we can start in small ways among ourselves, leavening the Leaven from within, and this leavening must be not only visible in persons but corporately, in institutions.

The units of communal life I propose must be linked

materially by at least proximity of residence (if possible, by corporate economic effort), and spiritually by the life of prayer. For example, a group of families could buy adjacent property - in town or country - agree to a co-operative life (in terms of whatever practical limitations there might be), and accept a rule in the life of prayer. In the earlier stages of such a group - say an urban group - representatives of each family would join daily in the Eucharist and in the Offices and all the members make a joint Communion on the Lord's Day in a parish church. Perhaps when such a group came to own property, it could establish a chapel. Such a community might best consist of five to ten families living in a neighbourhood and eventually in a group of individually or commonly owned houses. It would probably include people with varying interests and abilities, and it might or might not be most practical for the heads of families to be in roughly the same occupations. The latter would depend on the degree to which economic self-sufficiency could be established - in which case division of labour would be natural. This modern Little Gidding should not replace the parish, but be an example and a blessing to the parish, until the day comes when the parish again is a geographical reality. It should be stated here that this community could provide for parochial retreat - at first, and for a long time after its inception, it would be in demand for diocesan retreats, so poor are we for retreat-houses.

Specification of the material conditions of such life is difficult, for it has not yet been tried, and the present writer feels the general pressure of God's Will towards the goal of the life of prayer mingled with that of ordinary living, and no specific command to plan in detail rather than to experiment in hope, faith and love. But this is certain: whether or not such communities become more or less formally economic cooperatives and communal owners of real estate, would be strictly secondary to their being formally, and so actually, obedient to a rule of life and in all things obedient to the rule of Love. The life of the Church and the presence of a priest would be central to all decisions and provisions, in the attempt to recreate a visible Christian society, privately invoking God's Spirit and publicly manifesting His Son.

G.C.